

The purpose of this sheet is to provide parents and educators background information on child development and personal safety. This information will help with making important decisions in the best interest of children's personal safety.

The Growing Personality...

- Acceptance and belonging are most important
- They have a "pseudo-maturity" and feel they can "handle" more than they are ready for developmentally (invincible)
- Very sensitive and easily humiliated (extremely concerned about social judgment)
- Would rather act shamelessly in front of adults, out of free choice, than be forced into activities which would embarrass them in front of peers
- Emotionally vulnerable (may use Internet to confide in others)
- How they look and what others think may be most important to them
- Vulnerable to those who offer insincere flattery
- Separating from parents to form their own identity; feel deep embarrassment by parents
- Test loyalty of friendship through conflict
- Compare themselves to peers in effort to define themselves
- Seek belonging with others to build their identity
- Take huge emotional risks in search of their identity
- Will misrepresent the truth to avoid social judgment
- Hormonal changes affect mood
- May guide their actions by what feels right in the moment
- May become rebellious and explore with minor delinquency
- May experiment with drugs and alcohol
- May explore sexuality
- Demand privacy
- Change in sleep patterns; stay up later and sleep in longer
- Misreading adult emotions is common; they often confuse an adult's sadness with anger
- Focus on whether their behaviour conforms to the behaviour of others, not whether it is right or wrong
- Believe good behaviour is maintained by the presence of an adult

What do children want to do? New Interests...

- Use instant messaging (MSN, Yahoo, AOL, etc.)
- Use email
- Play games online with opponents
- Use web cams and digital cameras to send pictures
- Use cell phones (talking to friends recording, taking pictures, text messaging)
- Create personal webpages
- Use search engines to explore new topics (Google, Yahoo, Dogpile, etc.)
- Visit chatrooms
- Confide in friends online and offline
- Expect privacy, want more independence
- Explore neighbourhood with friends (bikes, skateboards, scooters, walking)
- Use file sharing programs to download music, photos, games and videos (eg. Kazaa, eDonkey, Napster, etc.)
- May consider running away
- Babysit
- Making money (employment)
- Volunteer
- Start dating
- Go to movies, concerts, carnivals, shopping with friends
- Sleepovers
- Mixed gender parties
- Increase time spent in extra-curricular activity



Things to Consider...

- Reinforce household guidelines for Internet use and set limits on the amount of time spent online
- Use filtering software
- Reinforce the public nature of the Internet and set the expectation that you will monitor their online activity
- Monitor increased independence. Even though adolescents can appear as though they can “handle” things, they actually require and unconsciously seek adult guidance and supervision
- Explain where it is appropriate for them to have privacy: confiding in close friends face-to-face, writing in a journal, private space in their bedroom (there is no privacy on the Internet)
- Know who they are communicating with through email and instant messaging
- Know their passwords and screen names
- Monitor use of peer-to-peer file sharing programs (used to download music and games) as they may be exposed to sexually explicit material
- Monitor use of webcams, cell phones, posting and exchanging pictures online
- Explain that pictures should only be accepted and sent with parental permission
- Explain that once a picture is sent online they lose control of what is done with it (it may never be completely removed from the Internet)
- Teach them that it is illegal for people to manufacture, possess or distribute naked or sexually explicit pictures of children under 18 years old (they need to tell a trusted adult if they are presented with this situation)
- Teach them that it is illegal for adults to offer them gifts or money in exchange for sexual activity
- Explain to children that it is illegal to threaten someone online or offline. If someone threatens them, they need to tell a trusted adult
- Explain to children that there is no need or urgency to respond to any messages. Teach children not to respond to messages that make them uncomfortable
- Teach them to trust their instincts*. Use “what if” scenarios* to help them anticipate possible situations and practice appropriate responses
- Teach children to use inaccurate information for member profiles, as they can be viewed publicly. Ensure screen names and nicknames are nondescript (not revealing interests, age, gender or posting pictures)
- Discuss dignity and self-respect and how it can be preserved or destroyed by messages sent online and offline
- Reinforce the concept of anonymity on the Internet (people can pretend to be anyone)
- Discuss the difference between healthy relationships and unhealthy relationships* (adolescents should never meet in person someone they first meet online without an accompanying parent)
- Discuss high-risk behaviour online and offline and create “what if” scenarios together to help them anticipate dangerous situations and possible solutions*
- Teach them to incorporate personal safety strategies* into their daily lives
- Teach them assertiveness skills
- Ensure they have at least one trusted adult they can talk to
- Empathize; they are easily hurt and embarrassed
- Encourage open communication and be conscious of their sensitivity to social judgment. They may be hesitant to share personal experiences
- Monitor and verify job offers and accompany them to interviews

• Adapted from: Linda Ashford; Sharon Cooper, M.D.; Gavin de Becker; Erik Erikson; Jay Giedd; William Glasser, M.D.; Daniel Goleman; Micheal Gurian; Kenneth Lanning; Mary Anne Layden and Linnea W. Smith, M.D.; Judith Lewis Herman; Amy Lynch; Jean Piaget; David Soussa; Deborah Yurgelun-Todd

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